

Message Text

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67

ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

USIA-15 IO-14 DRC-01 /104 W
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R 110946Z JUL 74 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6849
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY SAIGON
CINCPAC HONOLULU HI
USSAG NKP THAI

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E. O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: MILI, CB

SUBJECT: SOME RECENT ERRONEOUS UPI REPORTING ON CAMBODIA

REF: (A) STATE 147735
(B) PHNOM PENH 9158
(C) STATE 102657
(D) PHNOM PENH 6881
(E) FBIS BANGKOK 131339Z JUNE 1974
(F) STATE 133871
(G) PHNOM PENH 8459

1. WE ARE PLEASED TO COMPLY WITH DEPARTMENT'S REQUEST CONTAINED REF A FOR EXAMPLES OF "UPI GOING OFF HALF-ACKED AND FILING SEMI-SENSATIONAL STORIES THAT LACK ANY BASIS IN FACT" (REF B). IN ADDITION TO THE ERRONEOUS JULY 6 UPI DISPATCH ON THE ALLEGED KC SINKING OF KHMER NAVY GUNBOAT CARRYING SMUGGLED FOOD TO SOUTH VIETNAM ANALYZED IN REF B, FOLLOWING ARE THREE RECENT EXAMPLES OF ERRONEOUS REPORTING BY LOCAL UPI CORRESPONDENT.

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2. ON MAY 16, UPI REPORTED (SEE EA PRESS SUMMARY, REF C) THAT

KC "HIT MEKONG CONVOY IN HEAVIEST ATTACK OF CURRENT DRY SEASON, SANK ONE AMMO BARGE AND SET TWO OTHERS ABLAZE." DISPATCH FURTHER STATED "AMERICAN EMBASSY VALUES AMMO ON SUNK BARGE AT \$1.5 MILLION." IN REF D, WE POINTED OUT THAT: (A) ATTACK WAS SUBSTANTIALLY LESS INTENSE AND DAMAGING THAN EARLIER ONE OF FEBRUARY 18; (B) NO RPT NO AMMO BARGE OR VESSEL OF ANY TYPE WAS SUNK; (C) NO AMMO BARGES WERE DAMAGED; AND (D) ASSERTION THAT EMBASSY VALUED AMMO ON SUNKEN BARGE AT \$1.5 MILLION UNTRUE BECAUSE NO BARGE WAS SUNK.

3. ON JUNE 4, UPI REPORTED THAT, ACCORDING TO "VETERAN UPI COMBAT REPORTER-PHOTOGRAPHER," GKR POLICE SHOT AND KILLED GKR EDUCATION MINISTER AND PRESIDENTIAL ADVISER "WHEN BEING USED AS SHIELDS BY STUDENTS" AFTER THEY HAD BEEN TAKEN HOSTAGE BY THE STUDENTS AT THE LYCEE 18 MARCH. THIS VERSION WAS WHOLLY AT VARIANCE WITH THE FACTS AS OBSERVED AND REPORTED AT THE TIME BY KHMER JOURNALISTS AND OTHER EYEWITNESSES, INCLUDING THE CORRESPONDENT OF THE FAR EASTERN ECONOMIC REVIEW FRANCIS STARNER, VOA HONG KONG CORRESPONDENT ED CONLEY, AND THE EMBASSY'S LOCAL VOA STRINGER, ALL OF WHOM WERE PRESENT DURING THE INCIDENT. THE FACTS WERE THAT THE TWO MEN WERE NOT KILLED BY POLICE BULLETS. RATHER, THEY WERE SLAIN WHILE BEING HELD BY STUDENTS INSIDE THE LYCEE. THE AMBASSADOR LATER HAD OCCASION TO MENTION THIS MATTER TO UPI CORRESPONDENT, WHO ACKNOWLEDGED HIS ERROR.

4. ON OR ABOUT JUNE 20/21, UPI, APPARENTLY LEANING ON A KC CLANDESTINE RADIO BROADCAST (REF E), REPORTED (REF F) THAT KC HAD CAPTURED "FORMER ARMY OFFICER" RONALD RUSSELL SANDERSON ON JUNE 7 NEAR KOMPONG SOM. IN REF G WE REPORTED THAT (A) UPI DISPATCH WAS INACCURATE, (B) MISSION EMPLOYEE HAD SPOKEN WITH SANDERSON IN KOMPONG SOM ON JUNE 21, FOURTEEN DAYS AFTER HIS ALLEGED CAPTURE, AND (C) EMBOFF HAD ADVISED UPI LOCAL CORRESPONDENT ON JUNE 21 THAT SANDERSON WAS ALIVE AND WELL IN KOMPONG SOM AND NOT "CAPTURED."

5. COMMENT: WE HOPE THE FOREGOING WILL BE USEFUL IN THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DEPARTMENT'S FOLLOW-UP DISCUSSION WITH UPI'S STU HENSLEY. IT IS NOT RPT NOT OUR DESIRE OR INTENTION TO ENGAGE IN AN ARGUMENTATIVE EXCHANGE WITH PHNOM PENH-BASED NEWSMEN. WE ALSO RECOGNIZE THAT OUR VIEW OF LARGER EVENTS HERE WILL NOT ALWAYS COINCIDE WITH THAT OF RESPONSIBLE AND EXPERIENCED JOURNALISTS. WE DO, HOWEVER, CONSIDER IT NECESSARY THAT WE SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT IN INSTANCES OF INACCURATE NEWS REPORTING INVOLVING EASILY

VERIFIABLE FACTS. SENSATIONALIST REPORTING IS SOMETHING
WE MAY HAVE TO LIVE WITH, AND PHNOM PENH IS AWASH WITH
RUMORS AND WILD STORIES OF EVERY KIND. BUT WHEN ONE
NEWS SERVICE IS REPEATEDLY RESPONSIBLE FOR INACCURATE
AND TENDENTIOUS REPORTING, WE THINK IT SHOULD BE CALLED
TO DEPARTMENT'S ATTENTION SO THAT WASHINGTON WILL BE
BETTER ABLE TO JUDGE RELIABILITY OF SOURCE OF ITS NEWS.
DEAN

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